



EMPLOYEE FEDERATION

of

North Harris Montgomery

Community College District

2700 W. W. Thorne • Suite A-217 • Houston, Texas 77073



THE ADVOCATE

APRIL-MAY, 1993

Edited by Steve Davis

THE FEDERATION IN RETROSPECT

The union organized in February, 1980 under the name North Harris County College United Faculty, affiliated with the Texas Federation of Teachers, the American Federation of Teachers, and the AFL-CIO. We began with Kevin Bailey, current state representative from Aldine, serving as our first president and had twelve faculty members. We held our meetings off-campus because the administration forbade our meeting on-campus, using the mail, or even discussing the union at our "work-stations." The odds appeared to be against us, and many people were sure we would never last. We are now on our third generation of administrators, and are finally working with enlightened people who do not deliberately seek conflict and are able to resolve problems that do arise in a reasonable and timely manner. Our membership has increased over tenfold and as of March, 1990 was expanded to include a PSRP chapter (Para-professional and School Related Personnel), welcoming support staff to full membership. To reflect our more diversified membership, the union voted to rename itself the Employee Federation.

I sometimes find people who do not know exactly what the Federation has accomplished. Our work has ranged from highly visible activities to quiet discussions behind closed doors. Matters of confidentiality prevent me from discussing the latter in detail, but I can make general reference to them. Since 1980 the Federation has

- been the first employee group to address the Board of Trustees and has continued this practice

- been active in supporting and electing several pro-education citizens to the Board of Trustees

- represented and advised members in numerous personnel and grievance matters, including two cases of sexual harassment involving a total of four separate members

"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

--sponsored college scholarships for deserving students

--conducted several surveys of college employees on educational issues and presented the results to the Board for its consideration

--sponsored seminars on campus devoted to the quest for excellence in education

--presented the Award for Vision and Excellence in Education to Lt. Governor Bill Hobby and Representative Wilhelmina Delco in 1987 and Senator Carl Parker in 1990 in ceremonies hosted by the Federation on campus

--published The Advocate, which helps keep employees informed on relevant issues

--lobbied the state legislature on various educational issues and testified before the Senate Higher Education Committee on issues affecting the college

--worked with the administration and Board on matters of salary, benefits, and working conditions

--discovered unannounced changes in faculty contracts for 1992-93 which appeared to weaken the contract from a faculty perspective and worked with the administration to have the wording changed and the contracts re-issued

--secured an administrative agreement to provide all support staff at NHC with a regular report of the status of their sick leave and vacation days (implementation in progress) and to clarify policy on staff comp time

--originated the idea for the Aldine Center and worked hard to see this center developed.

The Federation is proud of these accomplishments and will continue to work hard in the pursuit of educational excellence. If you are not a member, we encourage you to join.

Alan Hall

LETTER TO THE ADVOCATE

Dear Alan and Steve:

Reflections on "Reflections on the Election," by Margaret Reap that appeared in The Advocate, February, 1993--

In the first full paragraph on the second page, Peggy writes "...and Robinson worked for her at the polls." Her, of course,

being Mary Matteson. This statement is totally wrong. I did not work for anybody else at the polls, only for my own candidacy.

Both Peggy and Mary knew that I was neutral during the election in their race. The other Board members knew this as did the Federation. I stated publically that either candidate would be a plus for the Board and NHMCCD and that I could work well with either one.

Also my thanks to the Federation for their support during the election. I know that the Federation's efforts greatly helped me to win with 70% of the vote.

Sincerely,
David Robinson

(Editor's note: We thank Dave for setting the record straight. He is a Professor of Political Science at UH-Downtown who has served on the Board since 1981.)

THOUGHTS ON STUDENTS

It's time to bring into open discussion something that has been a subject of great concern to me and many of my colleagues at Kingwood College. It seems more and more difficult to motivate our students to strive for academic excellence and to acquire a love of learning. This lack of commitment is reflected in my own case in a higher drop rate this semester than is customary. As I look at my final grade reports, the number of actual "W's" disguises the real dimensions of the problem, as it does not indicate a fair number of students who have quit coming to class since the last withdrawal date. Nor does it communicate the prevalence of students who will complete the term, but seem to merely "go through the motions," exhibiting little energy or enthusiasm for classroom proceedings. I do not believe my experience to be unique. I hear fellow instructors frequently express the same frustrations.

What's going on here? All of us who teach required courses are aware, due to the open-admissions character of this institution, that we are going to get many students who have not signed up for our classes out of a pure desire for knowledge. But I had always been confident through my tenure here, that I could win the bulk of such students over to an appreciation of my subject (U.S. history) and help them to have successful college careers. I've lost a lot of that confidence recently. There are just too many students who seem to be unreachable. I have wondered at times whether my teaching abilities have somehow declined. I always swore that the day I couldn't hold the attention of a class, I would quit and find another profession. This is a frightening consideration, in that it's probably the sort of thinking that causes some dedicated instructors to leave the classroom and go into administration.

In discussing the problem of the student motivation, it's always vital to remember though that many of our students are interested and devoted. Thank goodness for the non-traditional students in our daytime sections especially, as they tend to raise the level of entire classes. Among the recent high school graduates, there is also a core of students who are not only bright but serious. Even the students who are lackadaisical don't mean any offense, but are generally decent people. I know that one of my worst shortcomings as an instructor is to be unrealistic in feeling that all my students can be intellectually redeemed through my personal effort. Those of us in the trenches have to retain a healthy sense of limits. We tend to get carried away by the utopian rhetoric that naturally flows from the democratic character of the community college movement. Our work makes a difference, but the idea that we teachers at NHMCCD or anywhere else can be the agents of salvation for this society is a recipe for psychosis.

I would like to raise the following questions for consideration in the months ahead. Is the phenomenon of student disinterest I have described a District-wide trend? If so, what accounts for it? Have students somehow changed in the last few years or is "the fault, dear Brutus, in ourselves?" Most importantly, what do we do to improve the situation? There's bound to be some official at the District Office (some Under-Assistant Vice-Chancellor of something) who could provide some data and organize discussion and debate around this topic. Perhaps the fall inservice program could serve as a forum. I urge faculty members to write The Advocate with their own reflections on this issue. Nothing, after all, is more fundamental to our objectives than the question of whether or how we can inspire our students to do better.

In the meantime, I plan to use the coming time off to mentally recoup from this semester. A couple of days at the Hotel Galvez, a pitcher of margaritas, and some uninterrupted television baseball should be just the tonic I need. Enjoy your break too, and let's start afresh this summer.

Steve Davis

JOIN THE AFT!

All faculty and staff can enjoy the benefits of association with other employees committed to making NHMCCD an excellent place to work and teach--and the benefits of strong legal and professional liability protection should you ever need them. If you agree with the stances we take on educational and workplace issues, then it's time for you to join the union. Monthly dues rates are \$19.85 for fulltime faculty, \$12.70 for fulltime staff and adjunct faculty, and \$9.60 for part-time staff. Discuss membership with Alan Hall, District President (443-5544, 353-8634); Marilyn Kron, District Staff President; or any other member (Tony Foster, Thelma Jones, Bob Locander, Mel McFadden, Greg Mitchell, Patricia Plunk, Allen Vogt, Steve Davis) of the Federation executive committee.